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Evaluating a gender diversity workshop to promote positive learning environments

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Evaluating a gender diversity workshop to promote positive learning environments

Abstract

Drawing on data from an Aotearoa/New Zealand study of more than 230 secondary students, this article evaluates the potential of a 60 minute gender diversity workshop to address bullying and promote positive environments for learning. Students completed pre- and post-workshop questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise results with pre- to immediate post-workshop changes compared using t-tests. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse open-ended questionnaire responses. In summary, 237 students (mean age 13.7 years) attending 10 workshops participated in the study. Over 80% of students thought the gender diversity workshop would reduce bullying in schools, and 94% of participants reported that they would recommend the workshop to other young people. There was a significant increase in valuing ($p<0.001$) and understanding ($p<0.001$) gender diverse people pre- to post-workshop. School cultures were largely perceived to be 'hard' for gender diverse students, however, many respondents reported a desire to be supportive of their gender diverse peers. Reducing bullying related to gender identity and expression is very likely to have a positive impact on the mental health and educational achievement of young people. Brief diversity workshops, as a part of a wider suite of educational reforms, have potential to create safer environments for learning.

Keywords: bullying, diversity education, gender-based bullying, transgender, adolescence.

Evaluating a gender diversity workshop to promote positive learning environments

Bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity: “A moral outrage”

According to universal human rights principles, all people have the right to an education (United Nations, 1948)¹. Bullying school cultures, where students feel unsafe and unable to learn, represent a significant threat to this fundamental right. Existing research has identified that most school-based bullying occurs on the basis of two factors: sexuality and/or gender (Pinheiro, 2006). Greater recognition of such discrimination has led international bodies to take a firm stand against bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGI/E). In 2011, the UN Secretary General identified that SOGI/E-based bullying is “not restricted to a few countries but goes on in schools... in all parts of the world”, and then went on to describe it as a “moral outrage a grave violation to human rights and a public health crisis” (UN Secretary-General, 2011, para 3-4). In an attempt to address this crisis, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened an international consultation which produced the *Rio Statement on Homophobic Bullying and Education for All*² (UNESCO, 2011) and has conducted reviews of bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2012; 2015). These responses underline the fact that

¹ The Yogyakarta Principles (2007) affirm that this right must not be curtailed on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles_en.htm.

² The Rio Statement on Homophobic Bullying and Education for All (2011) affirms the responsibility of all states to provide universal access to education by eliminating the barriers created by homophobia and transphobia.

bullying on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression is an international problem that requires urgent, and comprehensive action³.

At the same time as SOGI/E-based bullying has reached a level of prominence within global policy dialogues there has also been a growing body of academic research on the lives of gender diverse people in education systems. To date, much of this research has focussed on the experiences of gender diverse people within higher education (Beemyn, et al., 2005a; Effrig, Bieschke & Locke, 2011; Dugan, Kusel & Simounet, 2012; Lennon & Mistler, 2010; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016; Pryor, 2015), with a particular emphasis on the hostile cultures experienced by gender diverse students, staff and faculty (Beemyn, 2003, 2005; Beemyn, et al., 2005b). Much less attention has been paid to gender diverse young people (Rands, 2009), particularly in schooling (for exceptions see: Luecke, 2011 & Ryan, Patraw & Bednar, 2013 for elementary; Gutierrez 2004 for alternative education; and Dykstra, 2005 for preschool). As Rands (2009) argues, the scarcity of studies is problematic because “transgender people participate in the educational system at all levels” (p. 421), and the voices of gender diverse young people need to be heard widely across educational debates.

This article focuses on how to shift the hostile secondary school cultures experienced by transgender, trans, or ‘gender diverse young people’⁴. Such a focus is important because

³ It is important to note that bullying on the basis of gender expression is not only an issue that effects gender diverse young people. All students, irrespective of their gender or sexual identities, can be targeted in this way.

⁴ At this point it is valuable to address what we mean by some of the categories used in this study. We use the term ‘gender diverse’ to speak about transgender, non-binary, and gender fluid young people (i.e. people whose sex assigned at birth may be incongruent with their gender identity), as well as non-normative gender identities that originate from non-Western linguistic-cultural traditions (e.g. *kathoey* in Thailand, or *fa’afafine* in Samoa). This term should be viewed as connected to others in circulation within the field such as ‘gender nonconforming’ (Toomey, McGuire & Russell, 2012) and ‘gender-variant’ (Hill & Menvielle, 2009). We use the term cisgender to refer to people who experience greater congruence

gender diverse young people report especially high levels of victimization and bullying within secondary education (Clark et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2011; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Results from Australia's "Writing Themselves In 3" study of 3,134 sexuality and gender diverse young people (where 91 participants identified with gender diversity) found that 61% of young people reported experiencing verbal abuse (Hillier et al., 2010) with this abuse most likely to happen at school (Hillier et al., 2010). In a nationally representative study of secondary schools students in Aotearoa/New Zealand (n=8,166), 1.2% of students reported being transgender, and over half of these students (53.5%) were afraid someone at school would hurt or bother them (Clark et al., 2014). The negative impacts of bullying on mental health is serious and long lasting (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011; Yeung Thompson & Leadbeater, 2012). There is evidence suggesting that the high levels of bullying victimization of gender diverse learners is related to increased absenteeism, decreased educational aspirations, and lower academic performance, with almost half of gender diverse learners missing a class in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable (Greytak, Kosciw & Diaz, 2009). Gender diverse young people are also much more likely to attempt suicide and experience significant depressive symptoms in comparison to their cisgender peers (Clark et al., 2014; Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014). Therefore, improving a school's culture towards gender diversity is

between their gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth. While the limits of space preclude a deeper examination, we would like to gesture to some of the ongoing debates that have informed our conceptual work. These include feminist poststructuralist deconstruction of the male/female binary (Davies et al., 2006); queer scholarship regarding the politics of normalization, particularly hetero- and (trans)gender normativities (Bornstein, 1995; Nicolazzo, 2016; Roen, 2002); and transgender studies debates about the social consequences of gender variance including high burdens in education (Toomey, McGuire & Russell, 2012) and health (Reisner et. al, 2016).

also likely to have major impacts on the physical and psychological health outcomes of gender diverse students.

While there is a growing amount of data on the prevalence of bullying based upon gender identity and expression amongst young people (e.g. Mahidol University, Plan International Thailand & UNESCO Bangkok, 2014), information is lacking on how to address the issues raised by this evidence. In response to this need, the current article focuses on evaluating potential solutions within secondary school settings.

The Aotearoa New Zealand context: Progress and backlash

This article extends an emerging body of research on gender diverse young people in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2008), particularly within schooling contexts (Burford, et al., 2015). The current picture of developments with regard to gender diverse young people in Aotearoa NZ is mixed. It is clear that there has been unprecedented media reporting in recent years, and some hard earned progress, such as the growth of ethnic minority secondary student groups undertaking community led education campaigns, and the increasing development of gender neutral bathrooms in secondary education (Edwards, 2016). While the narrative is broadly positive, progressive developments for gender diverse young people are not entirely secure, with ongoing campaigns from conservative lobby groups to stall progress and reverse these changes.

It is also important to note that any research on gender diversity in Aotearoa NZ is situated within the country's particular history of indigenous inhabitation, settler colonization and the significant migration of peoples from the islands of the South Pacific, among other migrant groups. As such, ethical approaches to such sexuality and gender research must

take account of both *tauiwi* (non-Māori) and indigenous Māori ways of knowing and describing sexuality and non-normative gender (Hutchings & Aspin, 2007; Kerekere, 2015). These include concepts such as *takatāpui*, which is a composite that includes all Māori with diverse gender identities and sexualities (Kerekere, 2105). It also means understanding particular identities, such as *whakawāhine* (transgender woman, or those born with the *wairua*, or soul, of a woman), and *tangata ira tāne* (transgender man, or those born with the *wairua*, or soul, of a man). Despite the above gestures at translation, each of these identities is articulated within a Māori worldview, and does not not simply reduce into Western concepts of ‘transgender’. This understanding also holds for Pacific identities in Aotearoa NZ, which have their own terms and emerge from distinct cultural worlds (Roen, 2001). In reporting on this study about the bullying and marginalization of gender diverse young people in Aotearoa NZ, we want to acknowledge the mana (authority, influence, power) of takatāpui and Pacific communities and the losses suffered by takatāpui, and Pacific gender minorities under colonization (Burford, et al., 2015; Kerekere, 2015). We affirm our collective responsibility to address these losses, and attend to the wellbeing of takatāpui. In explaining this commitment, we have sought to surface a wider ethics of representing the intersecting spaces of culture and gender identity/expression in post/colonial contexts, as well as to introduce the primary populations that participated in this study, which included a substantial number of Māori and Pacific young people (as we detail in the results section below).

The Workshop and Study

We evaluated an intervention that was 60 minutes in duration, specifically RainbowYOUTH’s (<http://www.ry.org.nz/>) gender diversity workshop, amongst

secondary school students. This workshop usually follows RainbowYOUTH's sexuality diversity workshop (which we have previously evaluated, see blinded for review, for further details). RainbowYOUTH was founded in 1989 and has delivered sexuality diversity workshops since 1997, with the gender diversity workshops being delivered since 2004. RainbowYOUTH's gender diversity workshop builds on a history of introductory level educational outreach, or what is commonly called "Trans 101" training within the field (Hanssmann, Morrison, Russian, 2008). These types of cultural competency trainings have been conducted since at least the 1990s by groups such as Transsexual Menace and the International Foundation for Gender Education (Green, 2010). "Trans 101" is a form of educational work which typically offers a "brief introduction about transpeople/identities and their experiences to an audience with little to no prior information" (Green, 2010, p. 4), and seeks to raise awareness about transgender discrimination, and to develop empathy toward transgender people (Green, 2010). A key strength of the RainbowYOUTH program has been the inclusion of transgender people in the development and delivery of workshop content, and its particular focus on undertaking educational work that has been designed with the Aotearoa NZ secondary context in mind.

For this mixed methods exploratory study we sought to formally assess the workshops with students from the ten classes that were interested in participating in this research. Our core objective was to understand whether gender diversity interventions, such as RainbowYOUTH's, might promote more positive environments for learning, by addressing school bullying.

Specifically, we wanted to investigate:

- Whether students thought that the workshop may reduce bullying;
- The usefulness and quality of the workshop as perceived by students;
- The impact of the workshop on students' attitudes and perceptions of gender diverse individuals immediately post-workshop; and,
- How students (irrespective of their gender) thought gender diverse students experienced their school culture.

Methods

Sample and data collection

Participants in the study were recruited from two public high schools supportive of RainbowYOUTH's gender diversity workshop in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand⁵. While another school was approached to participate in the study, it declined to do so (see discussion for further details). Both schools were co-educational, and provided secondary education to students from Years 9 to 13 in metropolitan Auckland. Each of the schools was allocated a low-range decile rating by the Ministry of Education (i.e. 1-3)⁶. Both of the schools had relatively high numbers of Pacific students. Students completed the workshop as part of their regularly scheduled health classes (Table 1 provides a summary of the workshop content). Most students had completed the sexuality diversity workshop prior

⁵ The selection of two schools was driven by practical considerations of achieving the research within one school term.

⁶ Decile rankings are a measure of the socio-economic composition of a school's community. For example, decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of low socio-economic students. These decile rankings are used to provide targeted funding to state and state-integrated schools (Ministry of Education, 2016).

to participating in the gender diversity workshop (for details on the results of this workshop see blinded for review).

Questionnaires

The pre-workshop questionnaire was administered immediately before the workshop and the post-workshop questionnaire was administered immediately after. The time required to complete these was approximately ten minutes and this was incorporated into the workshop plan. Both questionnaires were anonymous, but students were asked to use a unique identification (ID) code in this study so that pre and post data could be matched. The pre-workshop questionnaires were divided into two sections – demographic data⁷ and students' ratings based on six 100 millimetre long visual analogue scales (VAS) (i.e. statements and a corresponding continuum where students rate a statement between “not at all” at one end of the continuum to “very much so” at the other end of the continuum). Before each workshop the concept of VAS were explained to the students verbally and with an example statement (i.e. “I like maths”). This was done to ensure students understood how to complete their questionnaires and so that they were aware that answers on VAS would vary (i.e. there was no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer).

The post-workshop questionnaires were divided into four sections: demographic data; students' post-workshop ratings based on four VAS; four closed questions; and, five open-ended questions, in particular:

⁷ Participants were provided open response boxes in relation to their age and gender on the questionnaires, and were asked their ethnicity based on a standard Statistics New Zealand question (Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

1. What would you do if someone ‘came out’⁸ to you as a gender diverse person (e.g. trans, transgender, or fa’afafine)⁹?
2. What would it be like (or is it like) to be a gender diverse (e.g. trans, transgender, or fa’afafine) student at your school¹⁰?
3. What did you like about this workshop or what did you find most useful?
4. What did you not like about this workshop or what did you find least useful?
5. How will you interact with gender diverse (e.g. trans, transgender, or fa’afafine) students differently as a result of attending this workshop?

The open-ended questions formed the basis of the qualitative data for this study.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Northern X Regional Ethics Committee (reference NTX/12/EXP/095). Participants indicated consent by completing the anonymous questionnaires after reading the participant information sheet. Participants were informed that if they did not wish to take part they could elect not to complete questionnaires.

⁸ We acknowledge that a term like ‘coming out’ can have exclusionary effects. For future research, a more inclusive phrasing might be used, such as ‘disclosed they are transgender’.

⁹ Our desire in framing this question was to create something that was brief and easy to understand for young participants, at the same time as gesturing toward a diversity of gender diverse identities. The questions were pre-tested with an advisory group of sexuality and gender diverse young people to ensure comprehension and relevance, and amended accordingly. Given the high number of Pacific students at the schools we elected to include the Samoan term fa’afafine, literally meaning ‘in the way of the woman’, which describes people assigned male at birth who adopt behaviors associated with a feminine gender (Wallace, 2003, p. 140). In future studies we suggest that researchers in Aotearoa NZ explicitly address Māori gender identities in items, as well as other Pacific terms, such as the Cook Islands Māori concepts of akava’ine (“to be, or behave like a woman”) and 'akatāne (“to be, or behave like a man”).

¹⁰ We acknowledge that the wording of this question conflates the perceptions of cisgender students with the lived experiences of gender diverse students. However, in our analysis we were able to differentiate between the responses of the seven participants who reported a gender identity other than “Female/F/Girl” or “Male/M/Boy”, and other participants. Due to the fact that there were no discernibly different patterns in the responses to the question, we have analysed these responses together.

Data analysis

We used descriptive statistics to summarise: participants' demographic features; pre- and post-workshop ratings based on VAS (which were converted into a percentage score); and, responses to the post-workshop closed questions. Two statements were in the pre- and post-workshop questionnaire. The change on these VAS pre- to post-workshop were tested for statistical significance using paired t-tests. Statistical analyses were performed using PASW version 18.

We conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data generated in our study, in order to identify and analyse patterns, or recurrent themes. Thematic analysis offers an “accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77), and is a widely used analytic method. Thematic analysis involves identifying common patterns or themes in the data, analysing and then reporting on these themes. A theme captures something that the analyst feels is interesting or important about the data in relation to the research aims. The analytic procedures for this study began with the first author (JB) reading through participants' responses and creating response categories based on identified themes. Each statement generated by a participant was then assigned to one or more response categories according to its content. Once all responses had been coded, JB went through a process of modifying existing codes, and undertaking an analysis of material grouped under each code. Broader themes were then generated from the data.

Results

In total 237 students from 10 classes participated in the workshops, 236 students completed a pre-workshop questionnaire and 234 (98.7% of those present at the start of the class) completed a post-workshop questionnaire. All participants were aged between 12 and 15 years old (mean age 13.7 years). Almost half (47.7%, n=113) of the participants were “Female”, “F”, or “Girl” (inclusive of three participants who all reported being “female/women/lady/boss”), 45.6% of the participants were “Male”, “M”, or “Boy” (n=108). Seven participants (3.0%) reported something other than “Female/F/Girl” or “Male/M/Boy”, specifically they were “boy/boy”, “fa’afafine”, “female, I think!!! Straight”, “female/male”, “gay (male)”, “girl ½”, and “male” pre-workshop and “female” post-workshop (where “male” had been crossed out). Nine participants (3.8%) did not respond to the gender item on the questionnaire (i.e. this is missing data). Based on prioritized ethnicity (Lang, 2002) students were grouped: Māori (13.9%, n=33), Pacific (66.2%, n=157), Asian (11.4%, n=27), New Zealand European (1.3%, n=3)/Other (0.8%, n=2). Fifteen participants did not respond to the ethnicity question (i.e. 6.3% was therefore missing ethnicity data). Over 80% of students thought that the workshop on gender diversity would reduce bullying in schools, and 95.7% of students thought other schools should offer a workshop/class like this one (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Analysis of the open-ended questions produced three core themes: ‘hard’ school cultures, broadly positive individual student attitudes, and positive views on the effectiveness of the workshop. Participant quotations are reproduced verbatim (i.e. not corrected for spelling and grammar) in order to let the young people’s voices stand as they were recorded.

‘Hard’ school cultures

School cultures were largely described as negative for gender diverse students (or students who may be perceived as gender diverse). Participants described their school as ‘hard’ (n=24), ‘bullying/mocking’ (n=11), and ‘awkward/uncomfortable’ (n=15) for gender diverse students. As a 15 year old Tongan and Niuean female student (GAT22) responded: *“Our school doesn’t understand”*. In response to the question ‘what would it be like (or is it like) to be a gender diverse (e.g. trans, transgender, or fa’afafine) student at your school?’ participant responses often described a hostile culture, that produced negative emotions such as loneliness, embarrassment and sadness. For example, ~~(GAT44)~~ a 14 year old Samoan female student (GAT44) answered: *“I might be lonely. Might be sad. No-one wants to support me maybe”*. Her perspective was echoed by ~~GOT08~~, a 14 year old Tongan male student (GOT08) who wrote: *“It will be sad and embarrassed”* and ~~GAT67~~ a 15 year old Fijian male student (GAT67) who wrote *“Harsh. Mocked a lot and be sad”*. Other feelings, such as depression and fear were also noted. For example: *“I think it might be depressing because you might get bullied.”* (14 years old, Māori female, GAT26) and *“very scary because the school isnt use to having trans people”* (15 years old, Samoan girl, GAT54).

A number of students identified that such hostile school cultures were likely to have consequences for the learning of gender diverse students, for example ~~(GOT07)~~ a 14 year old Tongan female student (GOT07) wrote: *“It would be a little bit hard to work in school”*. A small number of participants could not describe what their school culture was like for gender diverse students, for example: *“I haven’t experienced it so im not quite sure.”* (15 years old, Samoan female, GOT65), *“I wouldn’t know because I aint a gender*

diverse” (14 years old, Māori, gender not supplied, GAT55). Within the dataset there were exceptions to the wide perception of ‘hard’ school cultures, for example a 14 year old Samoan female student (GOT18) replied “*Fa’afafine’s are popular at our school!*” and a 13 year old Māori female student (GON34) responded: “*People will accept you for who you are*”.

Broadly positive individual student attitudes

Despite their negative characterization of their school cultures, many participants indicated that they are already, or wish to become more ‘supportive’ and ‘respectful’ of their gender diverse peers (e.g. they would respond positively to a classmate disclosing a diverse gender identity or would just treat them ‘normally’). For example, a 14 year old female Samoan and African American student (GOT72) described the experience of gender diverse students at her school as being “*really hard*”. However, when asked how she would personally respond if someone ‘came out’ she reported she would “*respect their feelings & emotions*”. When asked what they would do if someone ‘came out’ to them as gender diverse many students wrote what we interpreted to be positive attitudes, these included statements such as: “*I would help and support them*” (Female, Samoan and Tongan, 13 years old, GON07), “*Say it’s alright. Be yourself. I can keep a secret*” (Female, Fijian Indian, 14 years old, GAT14), or “*Its cool. Socialize with them. Stay by there side. Stick up for them*” (Samoan, Niuean and Tokelauen female, 14 years old, GAT32). In contrast, however, a smaller number of participants endorsed a negative response (n=10) (e.g. ‘laughing’, ‘walking away’, and ‘being mad’), or an indifferent or unsure response (n=23) (e.g. ‘I don’t know’ and ‘I wouldn’t care’).

Positive views on the effectiveness of the workshop

Many participants characterised their experience of the workshop very positively. When responding to what they did not like (or found least useful) a large proportion of the students replied ‘nothing’. Indicative positive responses about the workshop included “*everything was AWESOME*” (Tongan male, 13 years old, GAN31) and “*I like the whole thing*” (Māori, Australian, Cook Islands female, 14 years old, GOT30). Students rated the personal stories of the volunteer storyteller very highly. The code ‘story’ was mentioned positively 47 times, and the name of the volunteer storyteller came up 27 times in student responses. Participant responses included “*I like how they bring non-straight people to share their stories. Cause then we know how it feels to be trans/gay.*” (Tongan female, 13 years old, GON39). Participants’ self-reported attitudes described after the workshop appeared to have changed to include more accepting views toward gender diverse people. Many students indicated that as a result of the workshop they would act ‘normally’ or be ‘more kind’ to gender diverse students. Some indicated specific actions, such as their intention to refer gender diverse students to relevant services such as RainbowYOUTH, for example “*I would tell them about rainbow youth*” (Tongan male, 14 years old, GOT14).

Discussion

Eighty percent of students indicated that they thought the workshop would help reduce bullying in schools, and the workshop was rated very favorably, in particular 93.9% of students would recommend the workshop to other young people. Our findings show statistically significant self-reported improvements in relation to valuing and

understanding gender diverse individuals immediately post-intervention. We also found that students perceived school cultures to be ‘hard’ and largely negative for gender diverse students. Despite characterizing their school cultures as challenging, most participants (more than two thirds) thought that adults at their school were caring, and many students reported that they were already, or wished to become, more supportive of their gender diverse peers. These positive individual attitudes illustrate a significant strength within schools to build more accepting cultures for gender diverse young people. Yet challenges remain, including a substantial minority of students who reported that they would not value gender diverse students following the workshop. Both the opportunities and challenges we have identified give further weight to efforts to expand the attention and ongoing work on gender diversity issues in secondary schools in Aotearoa NZ, and beyond.

Strengths and limitations

While there are a number of existing resources within sexuality education, including for example *Our Whole Lives* and *Family Life and Sexual Health* (see Green, 2010), we searched the literature and found no other comparable published studies which evaluated the impact of a gender diversity workshop for secondary school students. As such, this study, which seeks to formally evaluate the impacts that a gender diversity educational intervention has on promoting positive behavior for secondary school learning, makes an important contribution to the existing literature. We eliminated a retrospective bias for the quantitative changes over time data by collecting pre- and post-workshop questionnaires.

Because of the time limits of the school timetable, students were often hurrying to lunch or their next class. This meant that their engagement with the five open-ended questions of

the survey tended to be limited, with often only one or two sentence responses for each question. We have also been able to examine only the immediate self-reported impact of the workshop and we do not have tangible evidence of any behavior change. Therefore our conclusions are based on student-rated shifts in attitudes and knowledge which may only have been short-term in nature. This study should be seen to represent a ‘snap-shot’ of the experience of students, and further research is required in order to speak more authoritatively about the possible longer-term benefits of the intervention. Future studies could be done to obtain a sample more representative of students at a regional or national level (e.g. by ethnicity, location and school decile), and involve collecting follow-up data sometime after the workshop’s completion. Future qualitative research could also employ individual interviews to get develop more textured understandings of how young people may experience gender diversity workshops.

Comparisons to other research

Two international interventions (i.e. ‘Colours of the Rainbow’ and ‘Pride and Prejudice’), as well as RainbowYOUTH’s own sexuality diversity workshop, have also been rated positively and were perceived to be quality programmes by students (Bridge, 2007; Driver, 2008; Higgins, King, & Witthaus, 2001; Blinded for review). As with these other interventions on sexuality, RainbowYOUTH’s gender diversity workshop was delivered by people with expertise in working with gender diverse young people. Another similarity to these interventions was the school Year Level targeted. In the case of ‘Pride and Prejudice’ this package was acceptable to students of the lower Year Levels (Bridge, 2007; Higgins et al., 2001), whilst for ‘Colours of the Rainbow’ students considered that it was best delivered to lower and mid-levels (i.e. Year 9 to 11 students) (Driver, 2008). One

school declined to participate in this study because of concerns about how caregivers would react to this material being taught to Year 9 and 10 students. Douglas and colleagues (2001) highlighted a similar concern among teachers in the schools supporting their study on sexuality diversity in London (Douglas, Kemp, Aggleton, & Warwick, 2001). Teachers in the 'Colours of the Rainbow' study saw the merit of delivering their sexuality diversity program to younger high school students in order to promote more positive learning environments, even though they only delivered their intervention to 'sixth form students' (i.e. Year 12 and 13 students) (Driver, 2008).

Researchers have assessed the use of educational interventions such as additional training for teachers (Szalacha, 2003, 2004), developing gay-straight alliances (Lee, 2002), lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusive curricula (Greytak, Kosciw, Bosen, 2013) and improving school policies (Hansen, 2007), as a means to reduce bullying and improve a school's culture towards sexuality diverse students. However, our search of the peer-reviewed literature suggests that there is a tendency for gender diversity to be omitted when discussing bullying in schooling contexts, when sexuality and 'homophobic' bullying is in focus.

In general, studies that address bullying in schools have shown a 'dose response' relationship whereby schools that effectively implement multiple complimentary interventions are more likely to yield positive outcomes when it comes to reducing bullying and creating more supportive school cultures (Boyd & Barwick, 2011). Consequently, we recommend future work which addresses negative school cultures utilise a 'whole school approach' (Hunt et al., 2015) which views bullying as a systemic problem that must be addressed across the entire school context. Such an approach may include multiple

strategies, such as RainbowYOUTH's gender diversity workshop (or a similar program), as well as other educational interventions.

Closing provocations

We believe this study demonstrates the positive possibilities that may be opened by gender diversity education workshops in the secondary context. With an eye on future possibilities for research in this area, we would like to conclude with a series of provocations that gesture toward some potential lines of inquiry. The first question that remains to be answered is that of the paradoxical place of visibility (Barnhurst, 2007), especially in educational interventions with social justice aims. While raising awareness certainly can be a life-line that addresses issues of isolation and a dearth of positive representation, sometimes agency in the lives of gender diverse secondary students may be enacted via *invisibility*, as a form of survival amid a scene of social vulnerability. We acknowledge that at the same time interventions such as the one we have evaluated may do important work in demonstrating the possibilities of gender diversity, they may also provide bullies with new knowledge and potentially new targets for harassment. The second question that remains to be considered is the question of the normalizing work of gender diversity workshops. Rather than carving out space for respecting difference and abnormality, many students wrote that following the workshop that had expanded their concept of 'normal' to include their gender diverse peers. While being labelled as 'abnormal' often has negative material effects in the lives of young people (Nicolazzo, 2016), we also acknowledge radical traditions of transgender and queer critique which have viewed transgression as a site of positive potential (Roen, 2002). In this sense the project can be seen to dwell in a space of contradiction, having potentially emancipatory and de-stigmatising effects *as well*

as re-instating certain concepts of ‘normality’. Future research might consider how gender diversity pedagogies could be informed by queer pedagogies which have traced forms of refusing ‘normal practices and practices of normalcy’ (Britzman, 1995). The final provocations we offer are questions of focus and scale. Critics might rightly question the extent to which anti-bullying interventions divert focus away from structural forces (such as sexism, heteronormativity and cissexism) that shape the life possibilities for all students. While it is our view that the classroom and the diversity workshop remain important spaces to address some of the root causes of discrimination, further research might usefully unpack modes of simultaneously addressing the root while tackling some of its ill-effects.

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